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ABSTRACT

This booklet is the first in a series of monographs developed as a resource for middle-level leaders. It provides practical strategies, procedures, and ideas to enable school leaders to plan and implement programs that will provide opportunities for students to be prepared for high school and beyond. The text focuses on the application of team skills in creating a community for learning, teaching a core of common knowledge, ensuring success for all students, empowering teachers and administrators, and reengaging families in the education of young adolescents. It outlines strategies behind team development and implementation, which includes forming, storming, norming, and performing. It discusses the development of collaborative skills and presents a strategy for enhancing these skills, including promulgating a mission statement, devising an action plan, delineating team roles, deepening communication among team members, enhancing desirable team behaviors, fostering decision making, establishing ground rules to define team norms and acceptable/unacceptable behaviors, and using the scientific method to analyze the results. The booklet concludes with the observation that by being part of a team, teachers can overcome their isolation as they realize that they have compatriots who also want to pursue change. (Contains 12 references.) (RJM)

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NATIONAL ALLIANCE OF MIDDLE LEVEL SCHOOLS

TURNING POINTS: RECOMMENDATIONS INTO ACTION

ED 434 412

BUILDING EFFECTIVE MIDDLE LEVEL TEAMS

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EFFECTIVE MIDDLE
LEVEL TEAMS**

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About This Series

This publication is the first in a series of monographs developed by NASSP's National Alliance of Middle Level Schools as a resource for middle level leaders. The contents are recommended practical strategies, procedures, and ideas to enable school leaders to successfully plan and implement programs that will provide opportunities for students to be prepared for high school and beyond.

Topics of these NAMLS monographs will focus on implementing the recommendations put forth in *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century*, published by the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development. The monographs offer clear and concise procedures for successful implementation in a variety of school communities.

Jerry W. Valentine is the editor for this monograph series. He is the director of the Middle Level Leadership Center and a professor in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis at the University of Missouri, Columbia. The center works with NASSP and the Association's National Alliance of Middle Level Schools Advisory Council to identify and develop topics for this monograph series.

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Building Effective Middle Level Teams

A growing body of research about the characteristics of the most effective schools indicates that schools in which students learn at high levels usually have a "collegial" staffing structure and a strong sense of common purpose shared by teachers and administrators. "This is often described in the abstract as a 'shared moral order' or a 'school ethos,' but what it comes down to is that the professional staff functions as a team: it has clear objectives, works together smoothly, shares goals that transcend those of individual members, and shares a sense of responsibility for mutual enterprise" (Finn, 1985, p. 331).

In *Turning Points Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century* (Carnegie Corporation of New York, 1990) the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development offered a series of recommendations that "call upon all those deeply concerned about young adolescents' future, and the future of this nation, to begin now to create the nationwide constituency required to give American young adolescents the preparation they need for life in the 21st century" (p. 11). Implementing the following essential principles in *Turning Points* requires effective team structures. The essential principles that have implications for those interested in team development include:

- Large middle grade schools are divided into smaller communities for learning
- Middle grade schools transmit a core of common knowledge to all students
- Middle grade schools are organized to ensure success for all students
- Teachers and principals have the major responsibility and power to transform middle grade schools

- Families are allied with school staff through mutual respect, trust, and communication.

The implementation of the following recommendations can be strengthened through the application of team skills.

I. Creating a community for learning:

School should be a place where close, trusting relationships with adults and peers create a climate for personal growth and intellectual development.

- Create smaller learning environments.
- Form teams of teachers and students.

A high-performing team strives to become a learning community. Adults and students will benefit from the skills associated with team building so those skills may be applied to the building of healthy and productive relationships and contribute to the strength of the community.

II. Teaching a core of common knowledge:

Every student in the middle grades should learn to think critically through mastery of an appropriate body of knowledge, lead a healthy life, behave ethically and lawfully, and assume the responsibility of citizenship in a pluralistic society.

- Teach young adolescents to think critically.
- Teach young adolescents to be active citizens.

The appropriate body of knowledge and skills must be identified and strategies for modeling in the school environment planned and achieved through the efforts of teams, not individuals, to affect the entire school.

III. Ensuring success for all students:

All young adolescents should have the opportunity to succeed in every aspect of the middle grade program, regardless of previous achievement or the pace at which they learn.

- Group students for learning.
- Provide flexible scheduling.

Heterogeneous grouping, integrated curriculum, and flexible schedules can only be delivered by individuals committed to planning and implementing as a team.

IV. Empowering teachers and administrators: Decisions concerning the experiences of middle grade students should be made by the adults who know them best.

- Establish building governance committees.
- Designate leaders for the teaching process.

Effective building governance committees apply useful team structures, respect the team process, and consider themselves powerful advocates for student learning. In addition, a re-definition of the teacher role involves teachers working in new ways and with new goals. Understanding the stages of group development is critical to accelerating the achievement of the goals.

VII. Re-engaging families in the education of young adolescents: Families and middle grade schools must be allied through trust and respect if young adolescents are to succeed in school.

- Offer parents meaningful roles in school governance.

Effective shared decision-making efforts are contingent upon the shared norms, values, and goals of a group. Team building efforts enable a group to conduct meaningful work.

Healthy team structures and processes provide the necessary foundation for building middle-level programs that ensure students are prepared for the 21st century. While team building provides no guarantees that significant change will take place, it does provide the vehicle for principals to assume a leadership role in involving the entire school community in change efforts. Team building is not an end in itself,

rather it is the means to an end. If all goes well, the team can be a medium for changing the climate and practice in the school so that the student will succeed (Macroff, 1993).

Staff Development for Team Building

Building or developing effective teams does not just happen because a group of individuals has been designated as "a team." "Developing effective teams often takes as much time and effective planning as the work of the teams themselves" (Richardson, 1996, p. 4). The National Staff Development Council (NSDC), in cooperation with the National Association of Secondary Principals and eight other leading education associations, has prepared a set of staff development standards critical in the design of staff development focused on improving student learning. Two of these standards specifically address team building: Group (Team) Development and Collaborative Skills. These standards are discussed below, along with strategies and tools for their implementation.

Team Development

The NSDC (1995) Group Development Standard states: "Effective middle school staff development requires knowledge and use of the stages of group development to build effective, productive, and collegial teams" (pp. 35-36).

The isolation of one teacher in one classroom is an enduring reality in the majority of schools. Yet, the changes needed in most schools require that teachers work together in the classroom, in the preparation of curriculum and learning materials, and in supporting changes in instructional practice.

One does not learn to work with others merely by being placed on a team or in a group,

especially when working alone has been the norm. Rather, training in team building is required. Training in team building can increase a group's ability to work together more effectively.

Group productivity takes time—teams will not become effective overnight. Groups typically go through four predictable phases of development: forming, storming, norming, and performing. (Tuckman, cited in Johnson and Johnson, 1982). Teams may spend different amounts of time at each stage and may move through them in different sequences, yet each team will experience each stage. These stages may be described as follows:

Stage 1: Forming. When groups are first organized, a number of needs and questions arise. Team members at this stage have high expectations for the work. At the same time, they experience anxiety about where they fit individually, as well as what the organizational parameters are. Members might test the situation and its central figures, yet recognize they are dependent on authority to create structures for work.

Stage 2: Storming. In this stage, team members rebel against each other and often against authority. Members may express disappointment with the discrepancy between hopes and reality and with the dependence on authority. They can feel angry about goals, tasks, and action plans, and may feel incompetent and confused. Group members may compete for power and attention.

Stage 3: Norming. A team that successfully resolves the storming issues arrives at this stage. Dissatisfaction is replaced by harmony, trust, support, and respect. Group members have more confidence and self-esteem, and are more open and willing to provide feedback. There is a sense of responsibility and control, and operating procedures are institutionalized.

Stage 4: Performing. This stage describes a highly-productive team and is usually the last stage. Group members work collaboratively and interdependently, show confidence in accomplishing tasks, share leadership responsibilities, and perform substantive work.

All teams process through each stage to become a performing team. When new members are added, teams will often have to cycle back to review issues previously resolved. And when a team successfully arrives at the performing stage there is truly a great sense of accomplishment.

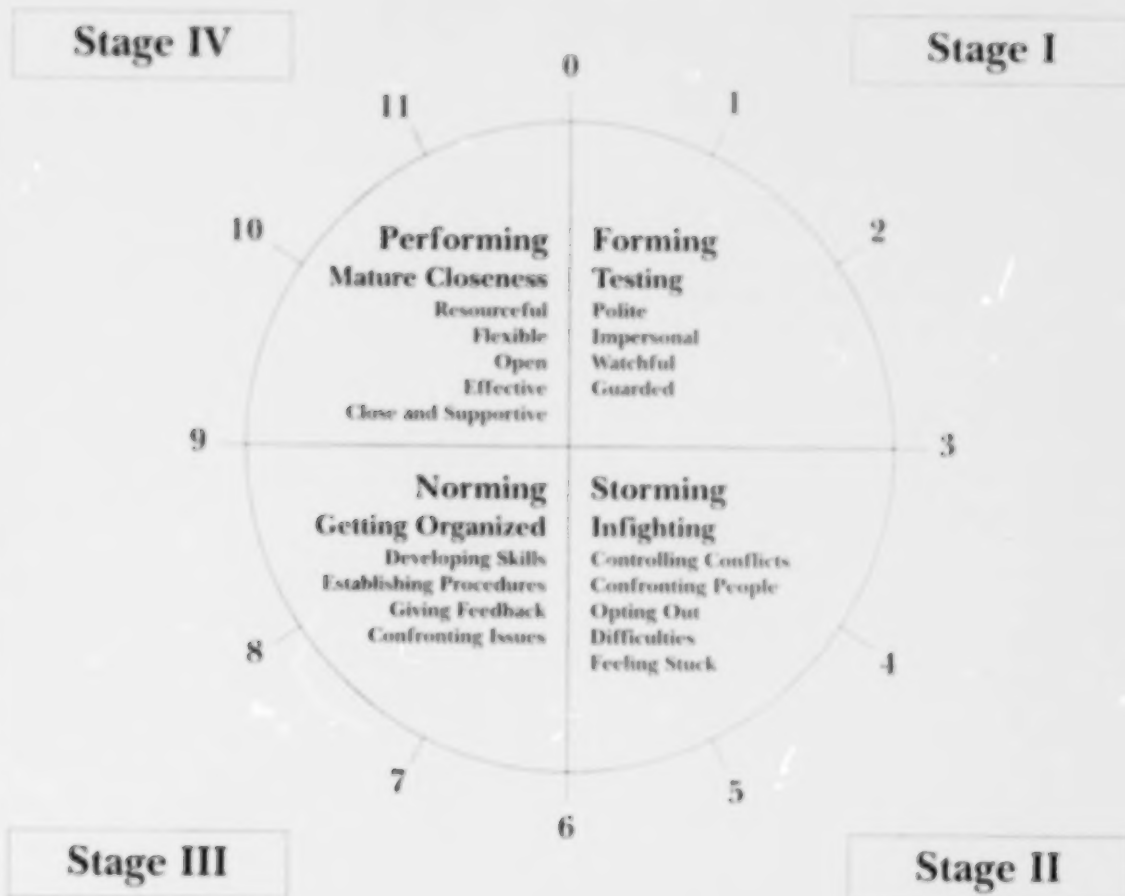
Implementation

A number of activities are associated with each of the above stages of team development. The first time the team is brought together each member of the team should be provided a copy of the Team Development Wheel (Figure 1). Review the above descriptions of each stage. Remind the team members that they can expect to form, storm, norm, and ultimately perform. Teams appreciate knowing in advance that they will naturally go through these stages. After reading the descriptions of each stage, each person should be asked to indicate where he or she views the team in terms of its development. Plot responses on an overhead of the wheel. Continue with team development activities based on the majority response, recognizing that some team members may view themselves individually in different places and that the team needs to attend to these issues as well.

Each of the four stages of team development is concerned with one or more major issues. In addition, a number of tasks are required at each stage. These issues and tasks are identified here, along with suggested strategies for accomplishing the tasks. These issues

Figure 1: Team Development Wheel

Instructions: Place a mark on the wheel to represent the present status of your team.



Reproduced with permission. Arbuckle, M., and Murray L.D., *Building Systems for Professional Growth, An Action Guide*, Massachusetts Regional Laboratory for Education Improvement of the Northeast and Islands and the Maine Department of Education and Cultural Services, 1989. Note: The group development language was introduced by Tuckman in 1965 and described in greater detail by Johnson and Johnson in *Joining Together: Group Theory and Group Skills*, New York, N.Y. Prentice Hall, 1982.

and tasks should be reviewed with the team. It is important that these tasks be accomplished before the team begins any work.

Stage I: Forming. Inclusion and trust are the issues teams should address in this stage. The tasks associated with the forming stage include: providing orientation; creating structure; defining goals, direction, and roles; and defining tasks and needed skills.

Some suggestions for addressing these tasks include:

- Plan icebreakers for all group gatherings
- Invite a "ranking official" to provide the "charge" to the team
- Assign roles or create procedures for designating facilitator, timekeeper, recorder, process observer.

A key activity associated with this stage is the development of a charge statement for the team (Hirsh, Delchant, and Sparks, 1995). Reaching consensus on a charge statement

helps avoid misunderstandings when a school team or other group assigns a task to a committee. A charge statement provides guidelines for team members, enabling them to understand the team's goal, the scope of their responsibilities, the resources available to them, and the deadline for accomplishing their task. The charge statement should be presented by the individual or group responsible for organizing the team and committed to the success of its work. The charge statement answers the following questions (see Figure 2):

- What is the specific purpose for this team?
- What is the team expected to achieve?
- To what extent can the team act on its plan?
- To whom is the team accountable?
- Who must be kept informed of progress? How will progress be shared?
- When must work be completed?
- What resources are available to the team?
- Who should be represented on the team? How should team members be appointed/selected or replaced?

Stage 2: Storming. The issues involved at the storming stage are power, control, and conflict. The tasks to be accomplished at this stage are to: develop skills needed for the actions; refine goals, roles and responsibilities; and learn to work together.

Strategies to address these issues and tasks include:

- Host a retreat to address the feelings and concerns of the group
- Implement selective abandonment to get the group refocused
- Write a professional code of conduct to direct how group members are expected to act toward each other

Figure 2: Charge Statement

Goal • What is the specific purpose for this group?

Product/Results Desired • What is the group expected to achieve?

Scope of Responsibility • To what extent can the group act on its plan?

Level of Authority • To whom is the group accountable?

Communication Linkages • Who must be kept informed of progress? How should they be kept informed?

Timeline • When must work be completed?

Resources Available • What resources (human and capital) are available to the group?

Team • Who should be represented on the team?

- Provide training on consensus building, conflict resolution, and group facilitation skills.

A major activity at this stage is building the team members' conflict resolution skills. School teams can resolve conflicts constructively if the individuals involved take time to identify their interests and separate their interests from their positions. An interest is defined as a desire, concern, goal, fear, or need, while a position is something people adopt because of an interest. When conflicting parties start with a position, rather than an interest, they may become deadlocked over whose solution to adopt before they identify the problem.

Focusing on interests enables teams to explore multiple ways of solving conflicts and allows individuals to discover their similar interests, which can help members draw together instead of becoming bogged down in destructive conflict. The following steps can help identify interests in a conflict and lead to a win-win solution:

- Ask each party to identify the concerns and goals as well as the problem that must be solved.
- Ask each party to identify what it would take for him or her to cooperate.
- Identify the criteria for a win-win solution by deciding what such a solution must include and what it would do or solve.
- Construct possible solutions based on the list of interests and evaluate each solution against the criteria for a win-win solution.
- Choose the best solution.

Stage 3: Norming. The issues at the norming stage involve relinquishing control by the leader, continued confrontation of conflict, and avoidance of "group think." The tasks involved at the norming stage are to deepen skills and understandings, increase productivity, evaluate critically and constructively, and examine team function.

Strategies to address these issues and tasks might include:

- Invite a critical friend to work with the group.
- Monitor and regularly update group norms.
- Plan appropriate celebrations for work accomplished.
- Provide additional training on meeting and group effectiveness.

A significant activity of the norming stage is developing strategies for closing and evaluating meetings. Participants need to review decisions and assignments and engage in self-analysis if they are to strive for continuous improvement. The following steps can be used when closing a meeting:

- Take care of "leftovers."
- Review agenda items not completed or discussed and clarify what needs to be carried over to the next agenda.
- Review decisions made during the meeting.
- Take time to appreciate the accomplishments of the meeting.
- Review all assignments made and make comments if necessary about sharing the workload.
- Clarify who will chair, facilitate, record, and call the next meeting. Try and set a date before you conclude.
- Make sure you have a plan for disseminating minutes.
- Use some type of evaluation (see, e.g., Figure 3: Meeting Evaluation Form) to get feedback on the meeting (Hirsh, Delchant, and Sparks, 1995).

Stage 4: Performing. Some issues teams should focus on during this stage include workload and timing. At the performing stage, the

Figure 3: Meeting Evaluation Form

1. How valuable was the meeting?

A waste of time	1	2	3	4	5	Extremely valuable
Comments:						

2. How effective was the facilitator?

Very ineffective	1	2	3	4	5	Extremely effective
Comments:						

3. How effective was the recorder?

Very ineffective	1	2	3	4	5	Extremely effective
Comments:						

4. How much were you able to contribute to the meeting?

I did not feel my input was considered	1	2	3	4	5	I felt my ideas/ recommendations influenced the direction of the group
Comments:						

What suggestions do you have for improving the next meeting?

Thank you for your thoughtful attention to the debriefing process.

tasks are to: complete all work, deal immediately and directly with interpersonal/group issues, continue to deepen knowledge and skills, and make efficient use of time.

Strategies for this stage might include:

- Ensure the group continues to learn together.
- Share leadership and task responsibilities.
- Consider methods for increasing time efficiency.
- Find ways to recognize and promote risk takers.

At this stage it is important to support the risk takers. Making a school safe for risk takers is an important way to increase learning for teachers and students. If a risk taker encounters embarrassment, reprisal, or punishment or is labeled a failure, then everyone learns the environment is not supportive of risk taking. Taking risks and making mistakes is a primary way people learn. Providing a work environment where risk taking is safe enhances self-esteem, personal confidence, and motivation (Sullivan, 1994).

To encourage risk-taking behavior, consider creating awards similar to the one created by the Staff Development Center for Howard County (Md.) Public Schools presented in Figure 4—the Golden Plunger Award. Another award, the “Golden Bomb,” could be awarded to the team member who took the biggest risk and although it “bombed,” the member learned a lesson from it. A poem by an unknown author uses these words to explain what happens to those who fear to risk:

They cannot learn, feel change,
grow, love, or live.
Chained by their attitudes, they
are like slaves for they have
forfeited their freedom.
Only a person who risks is free.

Development of Collaborative Skills

The NSDC (1994) Collaborative Skills Standard states: “Effective middle school staff development requires staff members to learn and apply collaborative skills to conduct meet-

Figure 4: The Golden Plunger Award

The Golden Plunger Award

presented to

Doris Vanek

For Courageously Plunging into New Endeavors

Accepting Challenges, and Achieving Success

June 1994

Source: *School Team Innovator*, National Staff Development Council, November 1994.

ings, make shared decisions, solve problems, and work collegially." (pp. 33-34)

Most school restructuring programs call for a deeper and more meaningful involvement of staff members in decision making. By empowering faculty to make decisions, it is reasoned, teachers will be better able to meet the needs of their students and will have greater ownership of proposed school improvement activities. Decentralization of decision making authority has been a major focus of most school restructuring efforts.

Site-based management, shared governance, and teacher empowerment are all efforts to engage stakeholders (teachers, parents, and students) in the continued development and improvement of the school. Leadership teams, school improvement teams, instructional councils, and advisory committees demonstrate this collaborative model, which requires new skills of both teachers and principals.

Making joint decisions with colleagues and administrators is a dramatic change for most teachers. Yet, without the development of strategies and techniques for effective collaboration, roles and relationships will remain the same. Unfortunately, in many cases, participatory decision making or membership on a team has been viewed as an end rather than a means for accomplishing better outcomes for students. Principals may be inclined to establish one or more teams and then leave them on their own. However, in order to be effective, the principal must have a close connection to the team.

According to Macroff (1993), "Principals can block what the team does if it goes forth and doesn't have the support, cooperation, and involvement of the principal. If the principal sees the team as a threat or just feels uneasy with it, the team can't very easily realize its full potential" (Richardson, 1996, p. 4).

Most teachers and administrators have little in their backgrounds to prepare them for the roles and responsibilities associated with collaborative decision making and team membership. For one thing, principals and other staff members need training in facilitation skills to ensure productive meetings. Facilitation requires open, honest discussions in safe and respectful settings. To accomplish this task, a sense of community must be created so respectful listening, honoring various perspectives, sharing, trusting, risk taking, and disclosing are consistent behaviors. Facilitation includes choosing from a variety of tools and strategies to ensure everyone is actively engaged in making decisions.

Implementation

Tom Swenson has been a staff developer for the Madison (Wisc.) School District for more than 20 years. His department has spent much of the last 10 years helping build school teams and enabling them to facilitate school improvement. Each school in the Madison district has a school improvement team of 12-20 members. Between half and two-thirds of the team members are teachers and other staff members. The school principal is always on the team. The remaining members come from the ranks of parents, community members, or (in high schools) students.

Swenson's experience has shown that school improvement teams that lack necessary skills do not have the capacity to focus primary attention on student learning. The Madison staff development department has created a team development curriculum that allows teams to assess their knowledge and skills and determine those new skills that may help them achieve their goals.

The staff development department advises teams that before they begin work they should

ensure their members agree on the answers to a number of key questions. These questions can be grouped into several areas which are, in effect, the key ingredients to successful team building. These key ingredients are: mission, action plan, team roles, communication, team behaviors, decision making, ground rules, confidentiality. The key questions, along with the strategies for addressing them, are discussed below.

1. Mission: What is the team's mission? How will the mission guide the work? Who are the customers / clients of the work? What are the desired outcomes?

The development of a mission statement is central to answering the above questions. A mission statement is a succinct, powerful statement about how a particular group or team will achieve its vision or goals. It provides guidance for actions on a daily basis. The mission answers questions like:

- What is the purpose of the team?
- What are the goals?
- What is valued?
- What must be accomplished to make this time commitment worthwhile?
- What are the cornerstone operations of the team?

A team can prepare a mission statement by responding individually to these critical questions, working in small groups to find key similarities and differences, and finally, seeking consensus. Once they reach consensus and draft a mission statement, it should be tested with these questions:

- Is it clear what and how the team will accomplish its goal?
- Is it powerful and succinct?
- Is it motivational?
- Will all stakeholders understand it?
- Does it represent worthy and valuable work that will benefit students?

The completed mission statement is not a static document to be filed away, as it may require periodic fine-tuning. The completed mission statement should be posted in places visible to everyone affected by it, and people should be encouraged and given the opportunity to provide feedback. Team members should review it at the beginning of all team meetings. All "proposed" team work should be tested against its impact on the mission and whether it will further the team's efforts to achieve its mission or sidetrack the team from effectively addressing the mission. When a team has a compelling mission statement, the choices regarding which work to pursue are clearer and more powerful.

2. Action Plan: What is the plan for accomplishing the mission? What specific improvement plans will be pursued? What are the time frames that guide the work?

Action plans should be directly aligned with the goals of the team. Action plans need to be thoroughly researched and no action should be initiated without confidence that the action will lead to the intended goal. Too many teams create work in an effort to "feel good" about their commitment. Substantive work is often more challenging to create and may take longer to develop than many are accustomed to waiting.

There are seven basic steps in the development of any quality action plan (Hirsh and Murphy, 1991). Consider these steps as the team develops action plans to achieve its goals:

Step 1: Brainstorm all possible strategies / plans to address the goals.

Step 2: Categorize your ideas / strategies and organize them to facilitate research regarding the potential effectiveness in achieving the team goals.

Step 3: Research your strategies / actions. Consider which have a legitimate research base or administrative support to ensure its success. Allow several months for this stage.

Step 4: Review the results of the research. Determine if additional strategies need to be identified for similar consideration. Clarify which strategies justify further investigation.

Step 5: Prepare cost/benefit analyses for each proposed strategy the team is still considering.

Step 6: Consider the various strategies for achieving the goals. Discuss the cost/benefit analysis for each strategy. Set a course of action.

Step 7: Write an action plan for the various strategies selected for achieving the group goals. A form such as that depicted in Figure 5 can be used in the development of the action plan. Whether this form or some other approach is used in developing the action plan, it is important that the following questions are asked in the process:

- **Title**—What is the subject of the work of the group?
- **Objective**—What is the proposed outcome of the plan?
- **Tasks**—What tasks are necessary to complete to achieve the outcome of the plan?
- **Begin Dates**—What is a reasonable date to start each activity?
- **End Dates**—What is a reasonable date to complete each activity?
- **Responsibility**—Who will assume responsibility for ensuring that each task is implemented as scheduled?
- **Evidence of Accomplishment**—What evidence will be produced to demonstrate the task was accomplished as planned? What other measures will be used to assess the impact of the activity on the overall goal?
- **Resources Required**—What supplies are necessary to complete the task?
- **Costs**—What are the costs of the supplies? What are other resource expenses including time and personnel?

- **Benefits**—What are specific benefits to the organization related to the accomplishment of the task?

Step 8: Determine a process for monitoring the implementation of the action plans and assessing their effectiveness in achieving overall group goals.

3. Team Roles: What is the scope of the team's work? Who is responsible for what in the action plans? How will the roles and responsibilities of team members be determined, assigned, and changed (when necessary)? What are the team's responsibilities and what are not?

To address the question of team roles, consider using the team role designations suggested originally by Doyle and Straus (1975): facilitator, recorder, and timekeeper. Before assigning team members to these roles, discuss the tasks associated with each role and determine the appropriate roles for various team settings. The tasks associated with each role are as follows:

Facilitator:

- Keeps the group on task by remaining neutral
- Focuses the energy of the group
- Makes sure that everyone has an opportunity to participate
- Protects group members from attack
- Makes pre-meeting and post-meeting arrangements
- Suggests alternative procedures in problem-solving situations
- Enables win-win solutions.

Recorder:

- Records data, information, and decisions on flip chart paper visible to entire group
- Provides frame of reference for work
- Helps latecomers catch up with the rest of the group

TITLE: _____

OBJECTIVE: _____

Continued

Figure 5: ••Action Plan••

Resource Required	Costs	Benefits

- Provides a focus point for meetings
- Creates the visual record of the meeting
- Provides meeting minutes/action minutes to increase sense of accomplishment of the group.

Timekeeper:

- Supports the work of the facilitator
- Enables participants to keep their attention focused on outcomes instead of time
- Monitors time allotted for tasks
- Updates group on how long the group is taking to accomplish tasks.

As roles are assigned, consider applying the concept of shared leadership to the functions necessary for effective meetings. Provide an opportunity for each individual to serve in each role at meetings throughout the life of the team. Don't allow someone to be labeled the "forever facilitator." Some people may appropriately or inappropriately view power and influence associated with such roles. As a result, it is healthy to provide everyone such an opportunity.

4. Communication: How will communication be facilitated and ensured within the team? How will the team monitor and improve (when necessary) communication?

Ensuring effective internal and external communication is imperative for teams. Creating a template for monitoring communication that addresses key questions at the end of each discussion or at least at the end of each meeting is one strategy for ensuring that vital communication links are never overlooked. Such a template would address such questions as:

- What are the key messages that need to be sent as a result of this discussion/meeting?
- Who needs to know?
- Who will deliver the message?
- How will the message/information be delivered?

- By when will the messages/information be delivered?
- What outcome is expected as a result of this communication?
- What outcome actually results?

5. Team Behaviors: What skills and practices will the team use to make discussions and meetings effective? How will the team give and receive feedback about individual and team behaviors? How will the team ensure group process checks?

The team has a responsibility to itself to ensure that all team members have an opportunity to participate and be recognized for their contributions. Some teams find it helpful to use a process-observer to provide feedback on how they are functioning. The process-observer collects data about communication styles/patterns, leadership, roles, decision-making processes, use of tools and strategies for solving problems, agendas, etc. The process-observer remains separate from the group to collect all information related to the purpose identified by the group. Using an instrument such as that presented in Figure 6, the process-observer records actual behavioral information for the group's review and discussion.

Typically, teams use a process-observer to provide feedback about their effectiveness in one or more of the following four areas: participation, decision making, communication, and group leadership. The process-observer records actual examples of responses and behaviors that address each of these areas. Specific questions that guide the observation are presented in Figure 6.

6. Decision Making: How will the team make decisions? What are the boundaries of its decision making authority?

Teams can use a number of strategies or processes to make decisions. Four effective

Figure 6: Process - Observer Guide

Things to look for:

Directions: Remove yourself from the group, sit slightly behind group members, but close enough to hear all the conversations and observe the non-verbal interactions. In each of the categories, look for behaviors by group members. Write each observation as a separate entry, and remember to only write objective information.

Focus	Behaviors Observed
Participation: Did all members participate? Did all have an opportunity to participate? Did anyone dominate? Did anyone remain silent? Who kept things moving? Did anyone make an effort to include a reluctant participant?	
Decision Making: Did the group determine the decision-making process prior to the discussion? What processes did the group use to come to a decision? Did everyone accept the decision? How did members influence the decision?	
Communication: What verbal behaviors were apparent: proposing building supporting seeking information giving information summarizing attacking Did members interrupt one another? Did members bring others in? Did members demonstrate active listening? Was anyone ignored? What non-verbal communication was present?	
Group Leadership: How did they ensure involvement? Did informal leaders emerge—how and when? How did the recorder and timekeeper support the group in its task?	

Reproduced with permission: Arbuckle, M., and Murray, E.D., *Building Systems for Professional Growth: An Action Guide*, Massachusetts Regional Laboratory for Education Improvement of the Northeast and Islands and the Maine Department of Education and Cultural Services, 1989. Note: The group development language was introduced by Tuckman in 1963 and described in greater detail by Johnson and Johnson in *Joining Together: Group Theory and Group Skills*, New York, NY: Prentice Hall, 1982.

strategies are described below (Hirsh, Delchant, and Sparks, 1995).

- *Brainstorming.* Brainstorming is used to elicit a large number of possible alternatives for resolving a problem. Brainstorming results can be improved by asking participants to adapt, modify, magnify, substitute, rearrange, reverse, combine, or otherwise change the ideas that have been presented. Different strategies can be used to assess and prioritize the results of brainstorming activities.
- *Balance sheets.* Balance sheets help a team examine two sides of an issue. A group may look at the pros and cons, advantages and disadvantages, past and present, or strengths and weaknesses of an issue. This strategy is useful when there is more than one good alternative and it would be helpful to evaluate the implications of all of them.
- *Paired comparisons.* Paired comparisons are used when the team has identified fewer than eight alternatives and would like to compare every alternative to every other alternative. It forces a choice and provides information about the relative value of every alternative. A worksheet such as that illustrated in Figure 7 can be used to calculate the relative value of each alternative. In the illustration given, five alternatives are compared with each other, yielding 10 possible paired comparisons (1 vs 2, 1 vs 3, 1 vs 4, etc.). As each comparison is made, a vote is awarded to the desired alternative. The alternative with the highest score is deemed to be the most preferred alternative.
- *Force-field analysis.* Force-field analysis identifies those factors that help or hinder the

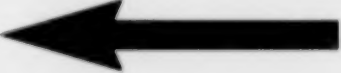
Figure 7: **Paired Comparisons Worksheet**

(5 Alternatives)

Comparisons: 1 vs 2 1 vs 3 1 vs 4 1 vs 5 2 vs 3 2 vs 4 2 vs 5 3 vs 4 3 vs 5 4 vs 5

Tally Votes Here	Total
Alternative 1	
Alternative 2	
Alternative 3	
Alternative 4	
Alternative 5	

Figure 8: Force-Field Analysis

Issue: _____	
What Is: _____ _____	Desired State: _____ _____
(What is helping you achieve your goal?)	(What is hindering your desired state?)
	

effort to close the gap between the "what is" and the "desired state" (see Figure 8). The desired result of the analysis is to help a group increase the number of factors that will support the full implementation of a project and decrease the factors that are interfering with implementation.

7. Ground Rules: What ground rules will define team norms and acceptable/unacceptable behaviors? How will ground rules be enforced?

Team ground rules provide an agreed-upon set of rules that ensure all group members understand expected norms of behavior and expedite the group process. Ground rules can be established to ensure all individuals have the opportunity to contribute in meetings, increase productivity and effectiveness, and facilitate the achievement of group goals. Group rules are customarily:

- Written as a team
- Reviewed often (beginning and end of each meeting)
- Posted in the meeting room or on the back of name plates
- Used to evaluate group effectiveness.

When groups begin to establish ground rules, the following should be considered:

- *Time:* Does the group want a particular meeting time set aside? Will the group begin and end on time? How will time parameters on the agenda be addressed?
- *Listening:* How will listening be encouraged? How will individuals listen to comments? How will discussion be handled? Differences of opinion? Interruptions?
- *Confidentiality:* What rules govern what is said at a meeting? Are meetings open or closed? What can be said after the meeting? How will parking lot meetings be handled?

Figure 9: **Sample Ground Rules**

Leadership Team Norms Within Which We Agree To Work

We will:

- Expect a leadership team member to make a commitment for one year.
- Meet only when there is a meaningful agenda.
- Start and end on time.
- Dress comfortably.
- Have refreshments.
- Have a different facilitator and recorder for each meeting.
- Keep meetings open.
- Differentiate between brainstorming and discussion.
- Only address school-wide issues.
- Express disagreement with ideas, not individuals.
- Feel responsible to express differing opinions within the meetings.
- Maintain confidentiality regarding disagreements expressed during the meeting.
- Reach decisions by consensus.

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- *Decision Making:* How will decisions be reached? Will majority rule or consensus be the norm? What processes will be utilized to arrive at a decision? How will all points of view be considered in the process? Is the team advisory or decision making?
- *Participation:* How will participation by all members be facilitated? Does the group value individual participation? How will it demonstrate it? What roles will be played by participants? What feedback will be offered?

- *Expectations:* How does one retain membership in the group? What does the team expect from individual members?

In the process of establishing ground rules, individuals should be allowed to express their views on the issues prior to moving to small groups. These steps are necessary before any group consensus on the ground rules can be achieved. A discussion starter might be: "Think about groups in which you have had a positive experience. Consider how these groups dealt with the above issues." A sample list of ground

rules from a school's leadership team are presented in Figure 9.

8. Scientific Method: How will the team make sure decision making/problem solving is data-driven? How will it be measured? How will the team seek to continually improve? How will the team recognize improvement?

One of the most significant challenges teams face is the use of data in the decision-making process. Being guided by impressions and perceptions is comfortable; however, any decision-making authority has the obligation to use data to either validate a perception or identify other issues that need to be addressed. Whenever an issue or problem comes before a decision-making authority certain questions need to be addressed.

To illustrate: one might ask: What evidence do we have that this is an issue/problem that requires the group's attention? And, if the group has only anecdotal data one might ask: What other kinds of data could be collected to affirm the anecdotal data?

To illustrate: if a team believes it needs to revise its curriculum because too many students are transferring to a college preparatory private school, rather than just acting on this perception, the team should gather data that would allow it to confirm or reject its perceptions and identify the actual reasons for the transfers. Among the data that might be collected would be data relative to: How many students are leaving? What percentage of the student body does this represent? Is this more or less than the previous five years? Have interviews been conducted with the families to determine actual reasons

for the transfers? Are other reasons possible?

After collecting and analyzing the data, the group should decide whether this is an area that requires its attention. If the group decides the issue/problem requires its attention, additional data-based questions should be brainstormed to ensure any action planning and decision making are informed by substantive data.

Conclusion

Team building should be more than a cosmetic exercise for schools. Being part of a team can help teachers overcome their isolation and remind them they have compatriots who also want to pursue change. Team building also builds process skills that enable teachers to interact in more productive ways in a variety of settings. In addition, as a result of their active participation on teams, teachers come to view themselves as researchers and as sources of knowledge for their peers.

The school also benefits from the intellectual atmosphere that is fostered by the continuous discussion of significant concerns by the teams. Moreover, school-based teams that involve the participation of their broad-based constituencies pave the way for establishing new relationships with business, foundations, and higher education that can help build a network of support for school-based professional development and other activities. Perhaps most importantly, as one principal reminds us, the value of the team structure comes from the fact that "all of us thinking together is better than one of us thinking alone" (Richardson, 1996, p. 1).

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NOTES



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